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## The Elite Factor in Nigeria's Political-Power Dynamics

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**Abstract.** One of the fundamental challenges of managing heterogeneous states is concerned with the provision of adequate political-power process. African states have had to contend with this fact since independence, and even more so in the post-independence era. In all this, there are specific cleavages forming the fulcrum of dissension among critical stakeholders. This work is beaming the searchlight on inter social-class relations. The work therefore focuses on the elite class, which by virtue of the capitalist orientation of the state holds the ace in determining political-power dynamics in Nigeria.

A historical perspective of the Nigerian state is undertaken to show that the departing colonialists had provided the foundational structure upon which political-power dynamics would be a straight-fight between the various centres of elite domination. A change from status quo would warrant a transformation of the existing socio-political order through a revolution. A change that would involve the critical mass not just as being legitimizing the activities of the elite, but being possibly part of the beneficiary of the political power dynamics. In understanding the basis of elite domination, it is pertinent to discuss social class-formation, a la capitalist mode of production. This would expose us to the role of the elites in political power dynamics, and how its stronghold on power has been legitimized and consolidated through liberal democracy.

**Keywords:** Elite, power-allocation, bourgeoisie, egalitarian, proletariat

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## Introduction

This paper deals with the analysis of a critical variable in executive power-sharing. Here, the focus is on the specific class within the social formation that competes, as it were, within itself to elect/select the members of government. We would discover that Nigeria strives to reflect her diversities in political power-allocation. Hence, the consideration is on the intrigues revolving around elite domination at the executive power-sharing level.

The reality of capitalism favours and empowers the elite over and above the critical mass of the people in the choice of political leadership. This situation is reflected in all economically liberal States- the most developed democracies are governed by the elites. The contradictions in the democratic system of government; among which are the sheer size of resources required to participate in political leadership contests, and the interlocking connections between political actors as a requirement for actualizing the dreams of leadership, are testimonies to the notion that “capitalism and democracy share a number of fundamental premises in common” (Fiss, 1992: 311). The author contends:

*The inequalities of economic power inherent in capitalism are not confined to the market. Unfortunately they reverberate in the political arena as well where, despite the rhetoric of ‘one person, one vote’, powerful economic interests are able to exert disproportionate political influence and are likely to capture the state apparatus and use it to their advantage (Fiss, 1992: 313).*

In the same vein, Fiss (1992: 315) further submits:

*The outcomes of elections are often determined by highly expensive public-relations campaigns on television and in the other media, requiring candidates to become dependent upon, or at least more responsive to, those with greater wealth.*

Incidentally, post-colonial African-States have not perfected the art of merging capitalist orientation with commitment to democracy, thereby accentuating the contradictions that were created by the colonial process. Taking a generic swipe on Africa's political leadership, Ihonvbere (1989: 52) contends:

*The political class had to use the political power which it had to create an economic base to secure itself. This was why many African countries, capitalist and socialist alike, expanded the public sector, bringing more areas of the economy under the state so as to enhance the economic control of the political class.*

In essence therefore, the crucial nexus between economics and politics (in the form of political advantage for the elites) is eloquently played out in post-colonial African States. The paper commences with a framework of analysis, by contextualizing elitism, thereafter a searchlight is beamed on the Nigerian scenario where we establish the critical role the elite has played in the political development of the country, which from all intent and purpose places that class on a higher pedestal than the mass of the people in the issues of political power dynamics. In the conclusion, it is recommended that it is only a peaceful revolution that can usher in a new era of social-class equality and improved representation for the critical mass of the people.

### **Contextualizing Elitism**

In articulating the basis of historical materialism through the combination of productive forces and relations of production, seven stages have been identified upon which the modes of production can be anchored. These include; the communal, Asiatic, classical, feudal, capitalist, socialist and communist modes of production (Mandel, 2002: 23). The emergence of elitism is rooted in capitalism- an ideology that promotes class-distinctions in societies. At the communal or foraging level of mode of production, societies existed on the pursuit and promotion of mutually beneficial collective aspirations and desires to

improve the commune, without conscious emphasis on the self. The scenario was that of communal living anchored on harmony and peaceful co-existence. None was superior to the other, and there were no differences derivable from personal possession; indeed, it could be argued that possessions were marked by equality amongst individuals and families/clans. In the absence of surplus product, the idea of a ruling class was non-existent. Thus, most societies received policy direction through gerontocracy; which allowed fair representation for family/clan members as the case may be. This system engendered equality and egalitarianism, with emphasis on collective appropriation of resources (Kelly, 1995).

A crack however emerged with the determination of groups to extract social surplus for the self, oftentimes through violence. This was further encouraged by the direct and forceful seizures of weak communities. The growing nature of domination received further impetus from the semi-theocratic aristocratic emergent ruling class. This was later transformed into the monarchical system; an outcome of 'might is right'. With its arbitrary nature of governance, monarchical rule further encouraged segmentation and differentiation in societies, thus discarding egalitarian ideology for the contests and tussles still prevalent in the acquisition and retention of political power today. In line with its mode of operation, the monarchical system divided society into the ruler and the ruled. In essence, the classless nature of the foraging mode of production had been transformed to a class-based society, initially existing on the basis of rulers (elite) and the ruled (masses) but later categorized as ruling/non-ruling elites and the masses. In essence, the moneyed class had been created, a class that collaborates with the politically powerful to control the destiny of the largest class in society; the poor workers (artisans and laborers). In effect, the monarchs and their economically buoyant acolytes became the elites, and in fact held the rest of society captive. Instructively, some monarchs were able to combine their political power with massive wealth.

The transformation of societies from their agrarian status to technological development and subsequently the industrial revolution represents the fundamental basis of class-relations. This is the capitalist mode of production.

Here, the fundamental *raison d'être* of the capitalist society is the private accumulation of capital for the purposes of exploiting wage labour. In Marxist analogy, the bourgeoisie (ruling-class), aided by the State revels in the perpetual domination of the proletariat (wage-labourers). These triggered the expansion of unequal opportunities and the consequent creation of elites in various segments of human endeavor; such that apart from the political and economic elite, there are also religious, military elite, etc. However, it must be noted that the concept of elitism has developed with cross-cutting character, such that the religious elite could as well be a political elite, and so on.

Flowing from above, elitism finds relevance in almost every aspect of human existence; from the sublime to the politically contentious arena of human relations. As indicated earlier, an apt description of elitism presupposes differentials on the basis of either ascribed or assumed power or authority. It demarcates individuals and groups in society into at least, two distinct categories, although, there are also sub-categories underneath the broad categorization. Little wonder therefore that the elite idea finds justifications in the philosophical underpinnings of society as class-based. Thus, whether in relation to power-dynamics at the governmental levels, economic prowess, religious domination or socio-cultural contests, the division of society into elite and non-elite classes is at the core of relationships. Elitism has thus attracted series of attention overtime, with each scholar justifying the explanation of the concept on the basis of the series of directions that relationships can tow. The various studies have thrown up the classic and contemporary debates on elitism, by delving into such areas as government institutions and structures with interest in the political-economy dimension of the relationships among the individuals/groups that work or propose to work the structures and institutions.

A most fundamental image of elitism is that which throws to the fore the salient relationship between politics and economics, and no where else is this fact celebrated than in the writings of both the classical and contemporary elite theorists. It is a creation of the political-economy dynamics of any society, derived through the very political dynamics and abilities that drive any social formation. Pareto, Mosca, Michels, Mills and Hunter have in different ways

contended in their theory of the elite that leadership issues in societies do not thrive on pluralism, but more importantly that the stratification paradigm holds the key to harmony within societies. Pareto's explanation of this arrangement is that the elite group is divided into: the governing and the non-governing elites. Thus, the special features ascribed to the elite whether in the governing category or not makes any member of the elite class, a superior class in any society. The author identifies two characteristics of the elite as both the psychological and irrational aspects, the latter being the assumed intellectual superiority of members of the elite group.

Mosca's explanation is not completely different; he also divides society into the ruling class and the non-ruling class. The ruling/political class is the elites and the sub-elites. The sub-elite in this context refers to technocrats, managers and civil-servants, who are way above the critical mass of the people in terms of access to opportunities from the State. In the ruling and non-ruling class analogy, the elite is presumed to be highly organized while the direct opposite holds for the masses, thus limiting the latter's ability to contest governing processes with the former. The ruling class determines the prevailing political and social forces of their epochs because ideas and institutions are created to suit their purposes, such that they dominate structures and values.

Amongst the classics, Michel's work is the only one that delves into bureaucracy and not the actual government undertakings. Michel argues that every social and political organization is run by a minority which makes the decisions. In essence, the complex nature and size of organizations encourages the existence of oligarchies which from all intent and purposes are made up of self-serving conservative elites. Michel therefore portrays every organization as elitist, because their organizational form is the basis for conservatism, one that is an inevitable outcome of power achieved through political organization.

Mills' understanding of the dynamism of power-elite is fundamental to our analysis. According to the author, power-elite describes the interface experienced by the three critical elite groups in any society; the political, military and economic elite. The individuals at the helm of affairs in these structures are bound to share a similar world-view; composed of the military metaphysic,

assumption of a class identity- which gives the feeling of superiority and separateness from the rest of society, internal mechanisms for interchangeability which allows movement between and within the three institutional structures and providing interlocking directorates. Lastly, is the powerful ability for cooption and socialization of prospective new members whose mannerisms have become acceptable to existing elites. In reality, the leaders of the institutional structures provide a difficult spate of cooperation based on the individual interests of each. A major characteristic of the group relies heavily on the necessity for maintaining their elite status. This puts a lot of pressure on their functions and relationships with the rest of the social formation. Sometimes, new members find their way into the elite clique, but basically the clique has a way of regenerating itself.

Other contemporary theorists that share similar elite-domination sentiments include Domhoff, Hunter, Putnam and Burnharm. Their major rallying point centers on the effectiveness with which economic elites are able to influence political outcomes and fashion the destiny of the rest of society. Putnam introduced a novel dimension to the debate by focusing on the powers of the policy-makers other than the democratic processes in portraying the roles of the elite as fundamental to the development of any modern society. In this wise, the elite work their way up the ladder so that they possess positions on corporate boards which provide the latitude for influence over the policy-planning organs through the creation of financial needs of the policy organs of corporations and governments, and thus influence the outcome of policies; for 'who pays the piper dictates the tune'. This scenario is confirmed in the no pretensions about the support of the Organized Private Sectors (OPS) to the ambitions of political-office seekers in Nigeria. Domhoff emphasizes the class dimension of elite domination more than any other scholar. Using the US as a model, Domhoff identifies the American business aristocracy as the corporate upper class which in the main has control over all the important segment of the society. Thus, through its economic power it becomes part of the governing class. Societal power is embedded in key economic corporations and political institutions in which the controllers are automatically the elite. And no matter what the situation

portends, they determine the economic and political fate of the rest of society through their influences on the policy-making organs of government. In other words, society is held ransom by a relatively small clique or minority who direct the political, economic and social fortunes of the rest and the larger part of society. The members of the clique are usually buoyed by their economic prowess which gives impetus to their abilities for political maneuvers and manipulations. Furthermore, there is the reality that members of the group are positively distinct which marks them out from the rest of society. They are assumed to possess personal resources, sometimes not in material form, but rather intelligence, skills and tact, while the rest of society are drab, and thus, can be easily manipulated.

Sociologically speaking, members of this group enjoy privileged status that is upheld by others in the lower status group. Though, various categories of elite exists; religious and social etc. but arguably the most powerful are the political elites. Because of the nature of politics, this group has become ubiquitous in contemporary societies. Their influence has become more pronounced following the emergence of the State-system, and the declining influences of monarchies in almost every part of the world. According to Lloyd (1970: 50):

*The most significant component of the concept elite defines the relationship with its counterpart- the masses. The elite influence the behavior of the masses; it is an imitable body of persons.*

The political elites constitute the governing class in any modern society. Though, with varying degree of acceptability due to human, group and organizational flaws, the political-elite determines the political fate of the other elites and indeed, the non-elites. Their preeminent roles as policy-initiators and decision-makers place them on a pedestal far above the rest of society.

Dogan & Higley (1998: 15) defines political elites as “holders of strategic positions in powerful organizations and movements, including dissident ones, who are able to affect national political outcomes regularly and significantly”. The authors’ categorization transcends democratic political systems. Under this



scenario, two variants can be discerned- “fundamentally disunited” and “consensually or ideocratically united” political elites (Dogan & Higley, 1998: 18). The former is composed of ‘strange-bedfellows’ marked by pervasive distrust and fear, with the ultimate aim of either acquiring or retaining political power. Accordingly, the participating groups/individuals “view politics in winner-take-all terms, dispute the worth of political institutions, and engage in unrestrained, often violent struggles for government power” (Dogan & Higley, 1998: 18). The authors give a perceptive summary of the motivations and inclinations of a disunited political elite grouping, thus:

*Where political elite is disunited, an irregular seizure of executive offices through a coup or elite-led uprising is probable ... Its result is usually an authoritarian regime operated by the group or groups that carry out the power seizure. Although crises and the elite struggles they involve may sometimes open the way to more democratic regimes, a new democratic order is likely to be short-lived unless elites have somehow managed to become more united during the crisis that produces that order.*

The above is an apt representation of the political elite relationship in the post-independent era in Nigeria, with the attendant consequences of military rule and instability on the political terrain. With the attainment of democracy, the consensual and ideocratic tendencies are reflected by vague political alliances that easily turn to conflict across and within party-lines. More particularly, Nigeria’s ethnic cleavage ensured another rallying point for displaying either disunited or ideocratic tendencies. Dudley’s (1982) description of the prevailing circumstances of the period is instructive. According to the author:

*Thus the Nigerian state became an instrument for private and sectional interests. It failed to wield the bourgeoisie into a coherent unit able to institutionalise*

*its rule over other classes. National unity and reconciliation express the ambition of the bourgeoisie to act as an hegemonic class, providing moral and political leadership at the national level and within the international political arena, but its tribalism is the outcome of the lack of control of the productive resources of the economy and hence the competition among the bourgeoisie for favoured access to scarce resources, and the need to manipulate particularistic interests and sentiments among the poor to maintain the bourgeoisie political domination.*

Disunity remains prevalent though with the unlikelihood of military adventurism that dominated the milieu in the past. The existing situation is that “groups are affiliated with competing parties, movements, and beliefs, but they share a consensus about rules and codes of restrained political competitions” (Dogan & Higley, 1998: 27). At the other extreme is the unity that exist among members of elite groups, which is adequately painted by Burton & Higley (1998: 47) where they state that:

*Elites become connected to one another through a web of power and influence networks that facilitate power sharing, they increasingly recognize boundaries and horizontal accountabilities between the organizations and institutions they head; and they come to expect that sanctions will be applied if boundaries and accountabilities are violated. Elites become accustomed, in other words, to respecting one another's basic organizational and sectional interests while engaging in essentially peaceful and restrained competitions for government power that involve appeals for the electoral support of somewhat conflicting mass interest and categories.*

The derivative from such consensually united elite is that “their competitions for electoral and other support are restrained and conducive to the peaceful, politically binding elections that are the hallmark of stable democracies ...” (Dogan & Higley, 1998: 19). It is equally argued that “no political elite is ever completely disunited” (Dogan & Higley, 1998: 19). This accounts for the changing ideologies of Nigeria’s political class as evidenced in the generally acceptable ‘carpet-crossing’ that characterise the political process. The driving force for the Nigerian political elite is unapologetically the acquisition of power. It is therefore safe to surmise that in Nigeria:

*Elite professions of ideocratic unanimity always conceal doctrinal disputes and much jockeying for power: a voluntary elite consensus about the rules and properties of restrained competitions is always fraying and in need of reinforcement; disunited elite expressions of unabridged oppositions are often belied by secret deals. The extent to which political elites are disunited or united thus fluctuates with changing circumstances, and the ambiguities and secretiveness of elite behaviour make its assessment difficult* (Dogan & Higley, 1998)

In a general reference to the actualization of power-seeking ambitions by political elites, Knight (1998: 39) refers to their circumstances as a combination of the “conjunctural (which may be amenable to elite control) and the structural (which usually is not)”. Thus, beyond potential abilities, the political elite is equally reliant on the public for political relevance, and sometimes, survival. Knight (1998: 41) argues that the pressure “as well as opportunities for elites, relate not only to inexorable forces but also to the more mutable allegiances of mass publics, whom elites lead, represent, or betray”. In the final analysis: “Even if we concede that mass publics without elite leadership are invariably ineffectual, we must also recognize that elites need mass publics and are, to varying degrees, constrained by their demands” (Knight, 1998: 42). However, it

must be noted that the extent to which the assertion is true is conditioned by prevailing circumstances of the societies concerned. Uroh (2004: 276) provides a vivid description of the Nigerian case where he contends:

*Many of the political parties operate more as fronts or instruments for the advancement of the selfish interests of powerful individuals in the state. It is these influential individuals who usually stand for elections or sponsor people into political offices. Thus, elections have failed to empower the genuine representatives of the people. Instead, they have served only as mere instruments for the political elite to short-cut their ways 'to political power'.*

The flagrant violation of electoral laws and the consequent flawed processes witnessed in Nigeria over the ages challenge the notion of the importance of the mass public. More than ever before, it appears the mass public only represent a legitimizing tool for electoral indiscretions. Thus, irrespective of the character of the political elite; benevolent or malevolent, the nature of contemporary State-system compels the mass of the people to surrender the mantle of political leadership to the group, for as Lloyd (1970: 4) had predicted about the future of post-independent African States:

*It is nevertheless clear that future political developments in African states will be strongly influenced by the composition and characteristics of the elites, and the degree of cohesiveness on internal rivalries.*

### **Elite and Political Development in Nigeria**

Class distinction, a concomitant of the paradigm shift from the communal mode of production, combines with other inequality-driven improvisations to lead to capitalism. Class distinctions have not only become fundamental to social theoretical analysis, they have equally become the reality of the contemporary

era in human relations. While theoretical endeavors attempt to objectively present the implications of this state of being on the human-race, empirical analysis presents a world in the throes of inequality. Capitalism subsequently gave full-expression to class distinction. Its impact and consequences became ever so glaring with the advent of the industrial revolution, and the attendant developments that widened and consolidated the differentials between humans based on ones acquisitive abilities and the opportunities presented for acquisition. Thus, through these economic formations, the initial and classical definitions of elitism combined with mere personal attributes distinguishing certain kinds of individuals from the rest of society, that of power (politics, and others) and all forms of influences that can be exerted on society by these categories of individuals. With this relationship pattern, human society inadvertently designed roles for various categories of people and groups. The elite, known in sociology as the upper class became imbued with the task of political governance, or having direct impact on governance processes. At the other extreme, is the critical mass of the people, who are destined to be ruled, thus, whose destinies are decided by the ruling class. However, it must be acknowledged that democracy recognizes the active role of the ruled in political processes. Theoretically, the critical mass must make a legitimate choice for leadership amongst the various members of the elite jostling from being 'mere' non-governing class elite to being members of the governing class elites.

The elite creation process in the large expanse of land in sub-Saharan Africa that later became Nigeria was mainly monarchical in nature. Except for few places like the eastern part, the political leadership of the traditional Nigerian society was headed by the monarch, who got into power through the exertions of earlier generations that had struggled to imprint the family name in the political calculations of the people concerned. These category of people, called the 'nobility' were also the moneyed class because they had farmland through which they became economically buoyant, much more than the rest of society. Thus, they bore the qualities of both political and economic elites. They held political powers, while they also controlled the economic fortunes of their society. Aside of the head, there were also titled chiefs, who though did not control as

much power as the latter, but was significantly distinct from the lower class in society. It was this governing class that interacted and collaborated with the foreign businessmen, who initially traded in slaves, but later turned out as colonial intruders.

However, a new coterie of elite emerged with the acceptance of western civilization through education. Quite a handful of this category of elite emerged through the transformation acquired with the aid of western education. Pareto describes them as those able to use intelligence and tact to cross the barrier from the non-governing class to the governing class. They sought and gained western education, which empowered them both politically and economically. At the time of their political maturity, they had the economic wherewithal to confront the colonial usurpers. At this time, most of the traditional authorities were uneducated, a development that created antagonisms within the rank of the elites. The traditional authorities would not easily accept the superiority, dominance and the claim to national leadership of the new elite. The difference is that the traditional authorities counted on the loyalty and obedience of their citizens, who were confined to their various localities; villages and townships. On the other hand, the enlightened elite continually applied their political and economic prowess to mobilize the rest of society, more especially because the battle for leadership was national in nature, and not restricted to particular localities. Lloyd (1970: 4) defines the elite as “those persons who were western-educated and wealthy to a high degree relative to the mass of the population”. Against this backdrop, differences can be made between elite groups of the earlier period; pre-independence elite groups, two elite groups that could be identified were; “the traditional elite of the political office-holders of tribal societies and the earlier westernized elite” (Lloyd, 1970: 14).

The traditional elite is seen as different from the modern elite in that traditional chiefs and rulers are of different elite status only in their own ethnic area, town, or village. The modern elite is a national elite, notwithstanding that members are prominent members of their own local elites. In the end, both groups of elite had to merge and form a formidable front against the colonizers before independence could be achieved. It should be noted that the traditional

rulers participated immensely in the series of conferences leading to Nigeria's independence.

With independence, the social alignment was transformed, shooting the educated elites far above the traditional authorities in national politics. Self-rule brought new range of opportunities to the State, and those with the basic requirement- education, tapped in and took advantage of the situation. Lloyd's (1966: 1) comment on the African situation would suffice:

*Throughout sub-Saharan Africa political power has been rapidly passing from the colonial rulers to members of indigenous national elites- men who are predominantly young, highly educated and comparatively wealthy.*

The alternative measure for the traditional authorities was the training of their children in order to compete at the highest level. Ake (1981: 47) opines that it was effected by "the concentration of educational opportunities on the people who already had high socio-economic status in traditional society, particularly the sons of chiefs". The apparent aim was to ensure that:

- "the potentially influential were indoctrinated;
- that the ones who had been exposed to indoctrination were also the ones who had the opportunities for leadership roles and upward mobility" (Ake, 1981: 47).

Onimode (1983: 40) further buttresses the point:

*The more aggressive sons and daughters of these feudal chiefs were given imperialist education and recruited into the ranks of the emerging Nigerian petty-bourgeoisie who were to entrench neo-colonial capitalism in alliance with British and other imperialists in the continuation of the oppression of the people after flag independence.*

In effect, the post-independent socio-economic and political structure was formed. It emerged with a typical division of society into the ruling class- governing/non-governing elite and the ruled. Dudley (1982) declares that

*... politics became a zero-sum game, in which opposition was ruthlessly suppressed, modified only by cartel agreements among the regional barons, aimed at securing their own fiefs from outside subversion and sharing out federal revenues, which became increasingly important after independence and were to be decisive with the development of oil production.*

Subsequently, this class was joined by the ambitious members of the armed forces. Nigeria thus became a theatre of the interplay of forces between the civilian and military political elites.

The only legitimate way for effecting the process during civil rule is through periodic elections. However, judging from the aftermath of all elections in Nigeria, none has ever been declared as 'free and fair'- the end result has always been intra-elite negotiations and compromises. And in cases where this has not been possible, like the 1965 elections and June 12, 1993 elections, uncertainty and violence rented the air. Indeed, governance process has remained an intra-elite competition. Coleman's (1986: 62) submission appropriately captures the scenario:

*For the Nigerian political elite, politics involves not the conciliation of competing demands arising from an examination of the various alternatives entailed by any course of political action, but the extraction of resources which can be used to satisfy elite demands and to buy political support. The political relationship is essentially a relation between patrons and clients in which the patron survives only to the extent that he satisfies the demands of his clients, and clients give their support insofar as the patron 'delivers the goods'.*



*The ability to extract, and therefore to deliver, is of course directly related to the extent of control over the instrumentalities of government.*

As such the critical mass of the people has not just been denied the opportunity to leadership but also the opportunity of determining their leaders. As a matter of fact, both the real and assumed requirements for aspiring to leadership positions have made it practically impossible for the non-elites to participate in governance processes.

Financial prowess is a critical element in partisan politics. In essence therefore, it is mainly the people of means that have possibilities of partaking in or having greater influences on the political circumstances of any democratic nation. The post-colonial nature of the Nigerian-State ensured the creation of the petit-bourgeois class and its attendant client-patron relationship.

## **Conclusions**

This paper has been an exposition on a critical dependent variable in Nigeria's political power process. The elite phenomenon has been identified as fundamental to the political processes of any liberal democratic State. This is because of the class-character that emerged after the foraging mode of production, and became entrenched in the capitalist mode of production in the history of humanity. Thus, at the various eons of the political development of Nigeria, the elite emerged as the dominant force. Amongst the elite are found both members of the ruling class- the governing and non-governing elite. Furthermore, the paper acknowledges the ability of the elite group to regenerate itself.

It must however be stated that the role of the elite in the development processes of the Nigerian State has placed specific burdens on its functioning. For a politically stable and economically developed State, the elite influence policy decisions with regard to the yearnings of the people. This is because obstacles would have been placed on the possibilities of protecting or advancing

selfish interest to the detriment of the State. The advanced political processes, to some extent limits the power-elite's grip on the rest of society.

In contrast, Nigeria emerged as a post-colonial politically unstable and economically underdeveloped African State, with the structures for allowing the emergent petit-bourgeois to tighten their grip on the rest of society. With the aid of the imperial lord, so as not to loosen the grip on Nigeria, the petit-bourgeois (with various centers such as the traditional institution, military, leading nationalist, etc) continually determine the fate of the rest of society. Pushing the masses to the background, active politicking has always been characterized by intra-elite contests, compromises and negotiations. The masses, as a conscious social class have never been able to determine its own political fate.

In summary, the nature of liberal democracy has limited the capacity of the masses as a force in political power dynamics; the case of the Nigerian masses is even made worse because of the entrenchment of the neo-colonialist agenda of patron-client relationship (Joseph, 1991: 55) which ensures the continued disempowering of the critical mass of the people. The reality to be established is that the elite is the dominant actor in political power-dynamics in Nigeria.

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